



African Languages Policy in the Education of South Africa: 20 Years of Freedom or Subjugation?

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the indigenous African languages policy in education debates in post-apartheid South Africa, and provides a policy review of language in education in the past 20 years of liberation in the South Africa. The research problem is that the post-1994 governments of South Africa stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) that indigenous official African languages must be in the curricula of the education system. But the findings reflect that this constitutional mandate has not been accomplished in the twenty years of South Africa's liberation. Conclusions drawn are that the former two official languages used in the education policies of the apartheid South Africa, i.e. English and Afrikaans, have continued to be used in pretended implementation of indigenous official African languages in the curricula of education of a free South Africa.

Key words: Indigenous African languages, language policy in education, culture and heritage, African history, liberation, multiculturalism, biculturalism, monoculturalism, and Kiswahili.

Résumé

Cet article met l'accent sur la politique des langues africaines indigènes dans les débats sur l'enseignement en Afrique du Sud post apartheid et offre une revue de la politique de la langue dans l'éducation au cours des 20 dernières années passées de libération en Afrique du Sud. Le problème de recherche est que les Gouvernements post 1994 de l'Afrique du Sud déclaraient dans la constitution de la République d'Afrique du Sud (1996)

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que les langues africaines officielles indigènes doivent figurer dans les programmes du système éducatif. Mais, les constatations montrent que ce mandat constitutionnel n'a pas été accompli au cours des vingt années de la libération de l'Afrique du Sud. Les conclusions tirées sont que les anciennes deux langues officielles utilisées dans les politiques d'éducation de l'Afrique du Sud sous l'apartheid, c'est-à-dire, l'anglais et l'afrikaans, ont continué à l'être dans la prétendue mise en œuvre des langues africaines officielles indigènes dans les programmes d'enseignement d'une Afrique du Sud libre.

Mots clés : langues africaine indigènes ; politique de la langue dans l'éducation ; culture et héritage ; histoire africaine ; libération ; multiculturalisme ; biticulturalisme mono-culturalisme ; Kiswahili.

Introduction

The people of South Africa celebrated 20 years of freedom from apartheid rule on 27 April 2014. They do not take this freedom for granted because they know what the liberation struggle cost them. At the same time, as they rejoice over the achievements they have made, they must critique their challenges. The use of African languages in education is one such challenge because, firstly, the knowledge, traditions and heritage that these languages convey are not part of the formal education conducted in English and Afrikaans; and the absence of these African languages in the system of education in the long run results in the loss of an African knowledge system and linguistic productivity. To give a practical illustration of what I infer by this, I have argued in a different article that:

For example, in medicine, health, heritage, arts and culture, black students enter universities with knowledge [acquired] in the medium of their respective African languages and cultures from their communities about herbs that grow naturally in the vegetation of their back yards. They also possess a knowledge about their heritage, arts and culture that is not necessarily housed in buildings called museums or galleries, but are carried in their heads and preserved in intangible ways that are then passed on to their children.¹

In particular, the African majority in South Africa must be concerned about the role and place of African languages in their national education. Secondly, Neville Alexander makes the point that “an English-only or even an English-mainly policy – prevents the majority of the people from gaining access to

vital information and, therefore, from full participation in the democratic political process.²

According to the 2013 Conference on ‘Multilingual Education in Africa’:

The key challenge is that the inherited formal education systems have remained culturally and linguistically alien to the majority of the populations in Africa; many Africans are not convinced about the usefulness of education, which was designed to satisfy colonial, missionary and postcolonial purposes. The Youth Forum of the 2012 ADEA Triennial consultation process demands ‘that African culture, history and languages be placed at the heart of the development of education and training ... so that skills are acquired in connection with our specific heritage.’

Where formal school education targets one language, it is usually the official or international language. People are thus trained for a limited linguistic and sociocultural space, and other relevant linguistic and socio-cultural spaces are neglected.³

That is why I think it is worth reviewing the past two decades of our liberation in relation to African language policy in education. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) provides a perfect entry point.⁴ A constitution is a document that protects the rights of the citizens of a concerned nation, irrespective of their religion, caste, creed, sex or physical appearance. A constitution, thus, can be safely said to be a social contract between the government and the people it governs.

The word ‘languages’ appears 26 times in the constitution of post-apartheid South Africa; and this word is cited in connection to the African languages (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). This in itself is a recognition of the importance of African languages in a liberated African country; and that is very important because, for the first time, the Constitution of South Africa refers to all the African languages as being the official languages of the country. The previous governments of South Africa, from the Union of South Africa in 1910, only had English and Dutch, which (in the case of Dutch) was later replaced by Afrikaans, as the only two official languages of South Africa until 1994.

The Constitution placed clear emphasis on African languages as the vehicle that should be used as the medium of instruction in schools. Firstly, section six of chapter 1 (Founding Provisions) of the Constitution classifies the 11 official languages of the Republic of South Africa. These include Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu’. Also included are ‘the Khoi, Nama and San languages’;

and then the constitution goes on to state that ‘recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.’⁵

Secondly, in chapter 2 (Bill of Rights) that addresses the language of instruction in schools, section 29, point 2 of the Constitution states:

Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account:

- (a) Equity;
- (b) Practicability; and
- (c) The need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.⁶

Thirdly, in the same chapter, on ‘language and culture’, section 30 states:

Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights.⁷

Fourthly, in the same chapter of bill of rights, that speaks to ‘cultural, religious and linguistic communities’, section 31, point 1 states,

Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community:

- (a) To enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and
- (b) To form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society (Ibid).

It is very clear that what the constitution says in the sections about ‘languages’, ‘education’, ‘language and culture’, and ‘cultural, religious and linguistic communities’, is that the official African languages must join the two former official languages, namely, English and Afrikaans, in the curricula and education system of South Africa. The starting point of explaining why this is necessary is to address the fundamental question of language in education through a review of literature on language policy in Africa.

Literature Review: Language Policy

The concern for The African languages in education policy of post-apartheid South Africa compels one 'to re-examine our entire colonial heritage',⁸ to use the phrase by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In his article, 'Europhone or African Memory', Thiong'o asserts that this process means having to continually examine our relationship to European memory in the organisation of knowledge. Wherever Europe went in the globe, it planted its memory. First on the landscape: Europe mapped, surveyed the land, and then named it.⁹ The most provocative example of this is contained in President Mandela's address to the Joint Houses of Parliament of the United Kingdom on 11 July 1996.¹⁰ His entire address is extremely relevant to the language question and the colonial heritage that Thiong'o challenges in 'Europhone or African Memory'. President Mandela told the British, 'to take only one of these - the Eastern Cape - it has such names as Port Elizabeth, East London, Grahamstown, King Williamstown, Alice, Albany, Somerset East, Fort Beaufort, Fort Glamorgan and simply, Queenstown.'¹¹ Precisely what this Mandela address expresses is that which Thiong'o articulates:

It is in naming that we can so clearly see the layering of one memory over another, the indigenous African memory of place buried under another, a foreign alluvium becoming the new visible identity of a place. Europeans implanted their memory on the minds of the colonised. To name is to express a relationship, mostly of ownership.¹²

But the coloniser did not end there; Europe went further and planted its memory on the intellect. This was achieved by imposing European languages on the conquered. In Africa this meant raising European languages, in our case, English, Dutch and later Afrikaans, to the level of an ideal whose achievement was the pinnacle of pure enlightenment. But language, of course, comes with culture. For instance, in recruiting the new servants of the empire from among the colonised, Lord Macaulay believed that teaching English in India would produce a class of natives, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect, who would stand as interpreters between them and the vast masses of the owned. Language is a means of organising and conceptualising reality, but it is also a bank for the memory generated by human interaction with the natural social environment. Each language, no matter how small, carries its memory of the world. Suppressing and diminishing the languages of the colonised also meant marginalising the memory they carried and elevating to a desirable universality the memory carried by the language of the conqueror. This obviously includes elevation of that language's conceptualisation of the world, including that of self and otherness.¹³

Thiong'o re-asserts that this blindness to the indigenous voice of Africans is a direct result of colonisation. His explanation is that, during colonisation, Africans were controlled by forcing them to speak European languages – they attempted to teach children (future generations) that speaking English is good and that native languages are bad by using negative reinforcement. Language was twisted into a mechanism that separated children from their own history because their own heritages were shared only at home, relying on orature in their native language. At school, they are told that the only way to advance is to memorise the textbook history in the coloniser's language. By removing their native language from their education they are separated from their history which is replaced by European history in European languages. This puts the lives of Africans more firmly in the control of the colonists.¹⁴

Thiong'o argues that colonisation was not simply a process of physical force. Rather, 'the bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.' In Kenya, colonisation propagated English as the language of education and as a result, orature in Kenyan indigenous languages withered away. This was devastating to African literature because 'language carries culture and culture carries (particularly through orature and literature) the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Therefore, how can the African experience be expressed properly in another language?'¹⁵ In essence, the formal education of schooling and university does not provide the African child with linguistic tools to experience the world with his/her own lenses.

Our various fields of knowledge of Africa are in many ways rooted in that entire colonial tradition of the outsider looking in, gathering and coding knowledge with the help of 'native' informants and then storing the final product in a European language for consumption by those who have access to that language.¹⁶

Since its creation in 1963, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU) has placed the language issue at the centre of its preoccupation. As stated by Kalema, 'the record of the Organisation of African Unity, OAU, on its commitment to Africa's indigenous languages is anything but impressive.'¹⁷ Article XXIX of the founding Charter of the OAU of May 1963 states that 'the working languages of the organisation and all its institutions shall be, if possible African languages, English and French, Arabic and Portuguese'; this is a clear indication of that commitment. Subsequently, many resolutions have been passed calling for a change of the *status quo* regarding the language issue in Africa. In that regard, while calling

for the linguistic liberation and the unity of Africa, Mateene, observes that 'years after the attainment of political independence, the majority of African independent states have continued to practise linguistic policies inherited at the time of independence, where, on the whole, foreign colonial languages are more favoured than the languages of the African continent.'¹⁸

Many African countries have experimented with diverse forms of bilingual and multilingual education. Several countries are mainstreaming mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger and South Africa.¹⁹ Take Ethiopia, for example. Despite being one of the poorest countries in the world, it has developed 23 languages for use as mediums of instruction in primary schools and advanced 13 languages for similar use in about 15 years.²⁰ African languages can be used in all spheres of life. Ethiopia's education system aims at multilingual language proficiency with English occupying an important place even though English is very little used (only by 0.3 per cent of the population in 2007). A comparison of students' performance in the Ethiopian system showed that students performed well in mother tongue-based multilingual education programmes.²¹ In other cases, like in Mali, research and practice prove that languages develop through use and that African languages can be used as languages of education right up to the end of tertiary education. For example, in Mali, one committed university professor teaches physics and chemistry in Bamana language of Mali. It is technically possible for every African language to be used at this level of academic discourse.²²

A challenge that is experienced in language policy in education relates to the lack of awareness about the difference between using a language as a medium of instruction and teaching a language as a subject. When a language is taught as a subject using second language teaching methodologies, no prior knowledge of the language is needed at the beginning. However, the use of a language as language of instruction requires prior knowledge because it is the medium through which new content matter must be understood and academic literacy is learned. Research from neighbouring country, Botswana, can illustrate this: it revealed that the switch from one medium of instruction (Setswana) to another in Year 5 (English) was a major reason why students dropped out or had to repeat the class. They simply did not master the language of instruction and testing, which, in this case, was English. At the beginning of Year 5, they had had exposure to only 800 words, but needed 7,000 to be able to follow the curriculum. Students who learn through a language of instruction which they do not master are hence disadvantaged in assessments (also in international assessments).²³ Research has shown that when students express themselves in a language they master in terms of content they get much better results

in assessments. It is those who speak English and Afrikaans as their mother tongue that benefit from the South African education system right now. All the others are thoroughly disadvantaged.

Many people, and especially English and Afrikaans speakers in decision-making positions, hold on to the belief that introducing African mother tongue-based multilingual education will be too expensive. Yet, costs need to be compared to the benefits. Research and current effective practice in education suggests a much higher rate of return on investment from mother tongue-based multilingual education in the medium and long-term, which justifies higher expenses.²⁴

Herman M. Batibo, a professor at the University of Botswana shares his experience on the language policy in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region with the identification of a five-fold policy options, namely the inclusive policy, the partially inclusive policy, the exclusive policy, the hierarchical policy, and adoption of the status quo.

The Inclusive Policy

This is a policy which aims at promoting all the indigenous languages to a national level, so as to be used in all public functions, including education, as far as possible. This is the policy adopted by Namibia, where English is the official language, but all the other languages are national languages. Up to now, Namibia has managed to involve 16 languages (out of 26) in education.²⁵ Although this policy allows true democracy and equality of all the languages, it has many challenges, particularly the costs for human and material resources.

Partially Inclusive Policy

This is a policy in which only a selected number of indigenous languages, usually the major ones, are promoted and used in education and other public functions. This is the case of a number of countries, like South Africa (with its 11 official languages, out of 23 languages in the country); Zambia (with seven languages used in education, out of 38 in the country); Mozambique (with its six languages used in education, out of 33 in the country); Malawi (with its three languages that are supposedly used in education, out of 14 languages in the country). One of the challenges of this policy is how to decide on which languages to promote and which to leave out. The number of speakers may not be the only criterion. Also, in most cases, the phase of implementation of these policies has tended to lag behind. For example, in Malawi, Chitumbuka and Chiyao are supposed to be used in education and the media in the same way as Chichewa. But, this has not been the case. Also, in South Africa, although the 11 official languages are supposed to be used equally in public, only English and, to a large extent, Afrikaans are used in most official and technical domains.

The remaining nine languages are still lagging behind twenty years into the country's liberation.

Exclusive Policy

This is a policy in which only one indigenous language, usually the most dominant in the country, is selected, as the national language, to be used in all public functions, including education. This is the case of Kiswahili (Tanzania), Setswana (Botswana), Malagasy (Madagascar) and Chichewa (Malawi, especially during the time of President Kamuzu Banda).²⁶

Hierarchical Policy

The case of Zimbabwe presents his fourth policy in which the status of a language is graded hierarchically, starting from official, national, provincial, district, areal and then localised. At each level several public functions would be allocated. The functions may involve education, media, judiciary, local administration, trade and commerce or village meetings, with the higher functions being given to the languages at the top. This is a policy which was adopted in Zimbabwe at one time, although not fully implemented. The policy allows the use of a selected local language in an area where the people need it best, and reserves the nationally dominant languages to deal with the more nationally based functions. In this case, the localised languages would be used for locally based functions like pre-school, primary education or village meetings. Although this policy allows communities to use their languages in different public domains, it may deny some people the use of their language in key domains. According to Hachipola, for example, in Zimbabwe, only national and provincial languages, like Chishona and Sindebele are used in education and the media and only the national language, Chishona, is used in local administration. Also, the policy may make speakers of localised languages switch from one medium to another, as they move to higher education.²⁷

In May 2001, the Zimbabwean poet, Fungai Machirori, wrote an article for *Mail & Guardian* newspaper in South Africa, titled 'Incomplete Me', in which she lamented an elite education in her country that is devoid of any real sense of place. I quote her colonial education experience in 1997 Bulawayo because it has relevance for language policy in South Africa:

It was when I was 15 that I remember completely disowning something African for the first time. My high school English teacher had given us the task of coming up with a poetry project that entailed analysing the life and works of one poet. Completely stuck and uncertain about how to go about the assignment, I approached my teacher.

‘Why don’t you consider looking at some of the works of an African poet, then?’ she asked me, after I’d walked her through my challenges with Keats, Shakespeare, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. To say I felt exasperated would be an understatement. I felt shattered that she thought my efforts would best be served by looking at some poet whose works we’d never studied before, a poet from an impoverished continent whose verse I imagined would be equally lacking. Surely there was some contemporary Western poet who could fit the bill better, I thought to myself.

More than ten years later, I’m ashamed to admit that these thoughts then coursed freely through my mind. But I can’t deny them because for many years my identity was based on deficient ideas of what being African meant and means to the diverse people of this lovely continent. After attending a predominantly black government primary school in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe’s second-largest city, I went on to a private girls’ high school in the same city. By then, 1997, the racial make-up of the school was beginning to change after an era during which one might have been excused for thinking that the school was located in some semi-rural English country.²⁸

Adoption of Status Quo

This is a policy that has been adopted by some countries, particularly those which were former French or Portuguese colonies. Such countries have decided to adopt the language policy left behind by the colonial administration, in which the ex-colonial language is not only the official language, but also the national medium that is used in national mobilisation. Although this policy enables the people to use a language which is technologically advanced and which links the country with the rest of the world, it has the disadvantage of only serving the interests of the elite, at the exclusion of the masses.²⁹

The almost exclusive use of former colonial languages as medium of instruction and for running national affairs in most African countries leads to the exclusion of the vast majority of Africans, as they are kept on the periphery of the political and socio-economic mainstreams, while the minority ruling elites and middle class aspirants enjoy an unfair advantage. The elite enclosure uses the former colonial languages to protect their privileges. All this leads to misinformed choices of the language to be used in the education of African children because the former colonial languages are perceived as a passport to a better life, though it is difficult for the vast majority of Africans to acquire these languages as they are not part and parcel of their cultural

universe. As an old man from one rural village in Southern Mozambique once told Sozinho F. Matsinhe, professor and Executive Secretary of African Academy of Languages (ACL), while talking about literacy campaigns that were conducted in Portuguese 'I can't find myself in these things they are trying to teach me! You see, when I go to sleep, I see my dreams in my Tsonga and now I have to learn Portuguese, which is never there in my dreams!'³⁰ The old man's remarks appropriately summarise one of the main issues that are never properly addressed whenever the subject of language in education in Africa is considered.

Tanzania presented the most insightful example of language policy in education that I personally experienced during my field research on 'Kiswahili Language in the National Education of Tanzania' at the University of Dar es Salaam, and at the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), in September-October 2011.³¹ As already explained above, most of the SADC countries have strived to promote one, several or all of the indigenous languages with the aim of enhancing local participation and fostering national unity and identity. But some countries, like Tanzania, decided to go further, especially motivated by the socialist ideologies of their founding president, Mwalimu Nyerere, in the 1970s and 1980s. At one time, it saw the English language as a remnant of colonialism and imperialism, and opted to apply a policy of subtractive bilingualism in which Kiswahili was gradually replacing English in all domains, including education and government business. Thus, Tanzania changed the status of English in the country from second to foreign language. English was no longer heard in any public places in Tanzania, except in institutions of higher learning. Even there at the University of Dar es Salaam in 2011, as I conducted my interviews with faculty members, I was told that Kiswahili language still dominates the student-teacher communication in the class and outside in comparison to English. 'The consequences', according to Batibo, 'were gravely damaging for Tanzania, which lost contact with the wider world, thus alienating itself socio-economically, technologically and culturally. Although English has been restored as the second language in Tanzania, the country is still recovering from this hard blow.'³²

I have a different view. Tanzania was the only foreign country – in Africa and outside Africa – in which on arrival, when I landed at the Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam, English or any other European language was not the *lingua franca* of the country; but Kiswahili, an African language, was the medium of communication. Everyone from taxi driver to students and professors at the university, communicates in Kiswahili. For the first time, I was in a foreign country where an African language was genuinely in the centre of all communications, and not a European language; and for me to do my fieldwork

research I had to purchase a Kiswahili-English to be able to communicate in this African language of a liberated African nation. The experience was profoundly African. The purpose of a country's or nation's language is to serve that country's citizenry; and not foreigners. English serves the interests of globalisation.

I want to end this literature review by returning the debate to South Africa. I do so by citing the following two studies, one titled, 'Mother Tongue Debate and Language Policy in South Africa' (2013), by Baba P. Tshotsho, at University of Heugh. Tshotsho's critical evaluation of the language policy rests on the argument that:

The vision of the African National Congress (ANC) government of promoting all 11 languages is just a symbolic gesture and is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. The South African government has not yet provided the human resources and physical resources needed to promote multilingualism.³³

Many agree with the idea that is presented of 'a symbolic gesture'; and it is a claim that is very difficult to dispute. That is my rationale for this twenty-year review to show with evidence from the terms of office of the five post-apartheid Ministers of Education, of Basic Education and of Higher Education and Training since 1994 the directions we have chosen to travel with language policy in education. At the same time, whilst I agree with the sentiments by Tshotsho, I do give the ruling party the benefit of doubt and even challenge it in this article by making six policy recommendations and policy strategies that I provide in the conclusion, which if implemented, will change this perceived 'symbolic gesture'; and the status quo of the language question in education forever.

The second study is 'The Case Against Bilingual and Multilingual Education in South Africa' (2002), by Kathleen Heugh, Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics, who wrote this occasional paper for *The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa* (PRAESA). She communicates one of the myths greatly associated with language policy in education, which says that 'bilingual or multilingual education is too expensive and we have only one option: English only (or mainly).'³⁴ Heugh attended a *Seminar: Review of Curriculum 2005* hosted by the Department of Education in Pretoria, on 22 January 2000. The seminar/workshop was designed to stimulate debate and initiate the curriculum review process. None of the presenters or panellists at any point made reference to the fact that our pupils speak a range of different languages or that this should be factored into the curriculum. When Heugh

challenged this, the panellists dismissed language as an issue, and indicated that it was too expensive to entertain multilingual education.

Heugh writes,

I have, since 1993, pointed out that we spend a great deal on textbooks in English each year, and on teachers' salaries on the pretext that we are providing an education through the medium of English. While we do this, the majority of pupils who write matric fail this examination. Many others drop out before they reach matric. We spend a great deal of money, 22% of the national budget, on an education system which fails more than half of the learners who manage to stay at school until the twelfth year. Only 27% of the pupils who begin school in South Africa exit with a school-leaving certificate after the twelfth grade.

From my own experience as an in-service teacher trainer, I know that most of the teachers with whom PRAESA comes into contact, and who teach in primary schools, do not themselves have sufficient English to teach through English. We do not hear them teaching in English in their classrooms despite the fact that they think they should do so and despite the fact that they tell us that they do teach through English. At best we hear teachers code-switching, but more often than not they are code-mixing (using two languages within the same sentence). The language model they provide for their pupils is a code-mixed model. This is the closest they can get to English medium and it is not English medium. Pretending that we can go for an English only or mainly option under these conditions or that we are really practising English mainly is not responsible and it reveals, unfortunately, a form of schizophrenia in which the truth is denied.³⁵

That is why the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa speaks of 'past injustices included the dehumanising, suppressing, diminishing and marginalising of African languages.'³⁶ The struggle was also about freeing the languages of the African; liberation in 1994 meant that the dominance of European languages on the African languages must end. That is why over the twenty-year period of democracy in South Africa, the Department of Education, and later Departments of Basic Education (DoE) and Higher Education and Training (DHET), have formulated, discussed and deliberated the various drafts on language policy in education.

First and foremost, it must be said that *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997)* expressed its future intention with the Language Policy of the country:

The Constitution gives full recognition to the fact that South Africa is a multilingual country, and multilingualism is a prime objective of national language policy in general and further education, as determined by the Minister in terms of the South African Schools Act, 1996. South Africa's rich language inheritance offers many opportunities and challenges to the higher education sector, but thus far there has been no national policy framework within which the higher education institutions could establish their own institutional language policies and programmes, and which would enable the Ministry of Education to lend support to the achievement of national language goals.³⁷

Post-Apartheid First Minister of Education: Sibusiso Bhengu

The first of this language policy came under the first Minister of Education in the post-apartheid dispensation, Sibusiso Bhengu, elected by President Mandela in 1994; and he occupied this post until 1999. It was called *The Language in Education Policy 1997* and was the first pronouncement on language in education by the new national department of education; it was the shortest policy document with only four pages. The policy was a point of departure on language debate at national level in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. Its preamble states:

...this Language-in-Education Policy Document should be seen as part of a continuous process by which policy for language in education is being developed as part of a national language plan encompassing all sectors of society, including the deaf community.³⁸

The policy acknowledges the country's cultural diversity as a valuable national asset and that is why the policy was tasked to promote the following:

- Multilingualism;
- The development of the official languages, and;
- Respect for all languages used in the country, including South African Sign Language.

The document confronted the problem with language policy that, I argue, continues to be the challenge of South Africa 20 years into our liberation with the question of African languages in education. That problem is that,

The inherited language-in-education policy in South Africa has been fraught with tensions, contradictions and sensitivities, and underpinned by racial and linguistic discrimination. A number of these discriminatory

policies have affected either the access of the learners to the education system or their success within it.³⁹

Let me address the promotion of multilingualism and its association with multiculturalism because the policy document mentions it first. I prefer these definitions of multiculturalism that say ‘the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest’; and, ‘the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society, as a state or nation.’⁴⁰ The assumption then is that it takes the first priority in the list of tasks that must be achieved by the policy. The majority of South Africans who are Africans are already multilingual and multicultural because in addition to their various African mother-tongue languages, they were forced by the successive colonial and apartheid governments to learn English, Dutch and later Afrikaans; and of course each of these languages were learnt with their cultures. In contrast, you cannot say the same about those whose mother-tongue languages are English and Afrikaans, even when the speakers are Africans – white and black. They are not multilingual and they are not multicultural; or at least the majority of them are not. They are bilingual and bicultural or even in some cases, monolingual and mono-cultural; because some Afrikaans speakers say they don’t speak English and some English speakers say they don’t speak Afrikaans – a product of the unhealed wounds of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. By biculturalism and mono-culturalism here I mean ‘the presence of two different cultures in the same country’, and ‘valuing of one’s ethnic/cultural group over others’ and, ‘belief in one “right” culture’, respectively.⁴¹

The point here is that the consequence of prioritising multilingualism or multiculturalism in the first *Language in Education Policy* of post-1994 dispensation is that it gave those whose languages were formally the official languages in the national education and curricula of the country to hide under the pretext of multilingualism and multiculturalism. In essence, as their languages continue to be the mediums of instruction and communication in education and national dialogues, they do not have to learn any other official language, i.e. African languages.

With the policies of nation-building and national reconciliation being at the centre of the first five years of post-apartheid South Africa in the presidency of Mandela, multilingualism and multiculturalism became the case of George Orwell’s famous statement that ‘all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.’⁴² What was supposed to have been more equal than others are the two other tasks that this first *Language in Education Policy* was meant to promote, one, the development of the official languages (read all African languages); and two, respect for all languages (read all African languages) used in the country,

including South African Sign Language. Simply and importantly, because we have said in the preamble of our constitution, ‘We, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past’; those past injustices included, dehumanising, suppressing, diminishing and marginalising of African languages. I would like to illustrate with a profound example of language by President Mandela that Zelda La Grange – whom he refers to as ‘my secretary and a real Afrikaner *boere-meisie*’⁴³ – shares in her book, *Good Morning, Mr Mandela*:

In the winter of 1995 the President [Mandela] was invited to a town in the Western Cape, Swellendam, a small village-like Afrikaans town along the Garden Route in South Africa, to receive the Freedom of the Town. It was an act of unity for a town that was dominated still by white Afrikaners to offer the President such an honour, and he agreed to accept it. Again, a few days prior to the event, he announced that he wanted me to go with him. He called me to Genadendal the day before, his official residence in Cape Town, and upon arrival asked me to sit down. Genadendal is the name of a small brown community in the rural Western Cape. He adopted the name for his official residence in Cape Town to pay homage to the community of Genadendal, which means something like ‘valley of gratitude’ when translated directly.

He announced that he wanted to practice his Afrikaans and I had to help him with pronouncement as his entire speech was in Afrikaans. He fired away and unceremoniously started reading. At first I didn’t have the heart to correct him but then he would look up every now and again to seek approval. I nodded like a real teacher and hated myself for appearing to be such a supremacist. Although I had been asked to help him, the situation presented was so typical of the apartheid era of a white overseeing what the black man was doing and the black man seeking approval from the white. I also couldn’t really understand what he was reading and I had to adjust my concentration level. Then he wanted to re-read the speech for a second time. So I agreed – who wouldn’t? – but this time I gathered some courage to add a few corrections. He was becoming more nervous to read and would peek at me over his reading glasses, this time seeking less approval but more affirmation. I nevertheless nodded...

On our way I thought about his speech and wondered whether he was going to remember the words we’d practiced the previous day... Arriving in Swellendam he was received with open arms and insisted on first

walking among the ordinary people, and when a little girl came to greet him on stage his face and body language opened completely. He spoke to her in Afrikaans too and she responded although she was shy. He enjoyed that interaction and I could see that he had a special connection to the child. He delivered his speech and remembered the words I had helped him with. It was perfect. *By delivering his entire speech in Afrikaans he reached out to the community's heart and people adored him for that.*⁴⁴

President Mandela's act of 'delivering of his entire speech in Afrikaans' was not a rhetorical deed; but a genuine reality in practice of what the policy calls for: developing the official languages and respect for all languages. The President's mother tongue language is isiXhosa, but he made time, took all the time, learned and practised how to pronounce words and to deliver his speech in Afrikaans; that was being considerate and respectful, and with that gesture the President '*reached out to the community's heart.*' Very seldom you will find leaders, managers, CEO, and Presidents (in the twenty-year period under review) reaching out to the people they lead in this manner. It is this sincere Mandela example with the people that the African languages policy in education calls for.

Another point that I have issues with in the *Language in Education Policy 1997* is that it states:

With regard to multiculturalism, globally and continentally (Africa), policy assumes that the learning of more than one language should be a general practice and principle in our society. The argument being multilingual should be a defining character of being South African. The multiculturalism approach was constructed also as a counter to any particular ethnic chauvinism or separatism through mutual understanding.⁴⁵

Here the policy should have been explicit about this phrase: 'the learning of more than one language should be a general practice and principle in our society.' The majority, whose languages have been dehumanised for more than a century already, by force, have learnt 'more than one language.' So, this phrase does not really refer to this dehumanised majority or to the African languages. This part of the policy should have been clear and said 'the learning of more than one language should be an African language (other than Afrikaans) as a general practice and principle of our society.'

Another criticism, I argue, is that the objective in the policy to counter any particular ethnic chauvinism or separatism should not be achieved at

the cost of prioritising multiculturalism approach that benefits English and Afrikaans at the expense of all other African languages; as if 'any particular ethnic chauvinism or separatism' cannot be about the English people or the Afrikaners because ethnicity is colonially and in the segregationist language of apartheid associated with Africa and African people than it is with Europe, Europeans and white people.

Reading closely under the term of office of Minister Bhengu in the current Department of Basic Education website, the first key development reads 'the Language in Education Policy of 1997 is based on the principle of the right of children to be educated in their mother tongue whilst having access to a global language such as English.'⁴⁶ This originates from the constitution in chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights on 'education', that 'everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions.'⁴⁷

That 'principle of the right of children to be educated in their mother tongue,' and that, 'everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice' that are enshrined in the constitution remain a dream for the African majority; whose mother-tongue languages are not English and Afrikaans because the principle has not been implemented.⁴⁸ But this principle of the right of children to be educated in their mother tongue continues to apply to the children, families and communities whose mother-tongues are English and Afrikaans. Let's drive the point home the more. Let's take an example of a medium English and Afrikaans school, where all teachers are white and speak either English or Afrikaans, or both, and not an African language; and where the African pupils whose mother tongues are neither English nor Afrikaans. These pupils are in the same class with their white pupil colleagues whose home languages are either English or Afrikaans, or even both. Say the African pupil, English pupil and Afrikaner pupil for some reason did not understand a concept or phrase in the class during the lesson. After class, each of these three pupils visit their teacher in the staff room to ask to clarify the concept or phrase, do you think the teacher will offer to repeat his/her explanation of the concept or phrase of the lesson in the language of the African pupil or in the languages of the white pupils? If these pupils meet the teacher individually, the expectations are that the teacher, knowing what the home languages of each of the white pupils are, will certainly communicate to them in either English or Afrikaans or even code-mixing (using the two languages in the same sentence). But it will certainly be different for the African pupil; the teacher in the first place does not speak any African language beyond being able to greet people in that language. 'In application, monoculturalism posits the individual's culture as normal and

valid. Other cultures are viewed as abnormal, inferior, or pathological, with corresponding differential treatment.⁴⁹ So it is normal and valid that the teacher will provide his/her explanation to the African pupil in the teacher's language(s) that also happen(s) to be the medium of communication of the school; and not in the African language of the African pupil.

There are challenges (that on their own merit require writing another paper) to making this a reality, but they must be tackled head on like apartheid was challenged directly and was defeated; and, while it is wrong to suggest that the political and cultural leaders alone have to break the logjam, it is clear after many years of reflection and intervention at many different levels that political will and commitment are going to be the decisive elements if we are to move from the point where the European languages dominate our societies to a point where African languages do so.⁵⁰

This 'principle of the right of children to be educated in their mother tongue' is very important; that is why it is in the country's constitution. It is a social contract between the government and the people it governs; but it is not executed and practised in the manner and instruction that is inscribed in the constitution. This is a social injustice that continues. The result is that today, as we celebrate 20 years of liberation, and in these times of freedom, many African children cannot communicate in their mother-tongues. How do we call this freedom?

Minister of Education: Kader Asmal

When Thabo Mbeki became the president of South Africa in 1999, he appointed Kader Asmal to replace Bhengu as the Minister of Education. Asmal came up with the *National Plan for Higher Education (2001)*; and in relation to languages, it stipulated that in the next 5 to 10 years, the Ministry would 'encourage the development of programmes in marginalised fields of study such as African languages, as well as the more general restructuring of curricula to reflect an orientation towards the African continent.'⁵¹

The Mbeki presidency was about African Renaissance; and for that, the envisaged changed enrolments by fields of study in the *National Plan for Higher Education* were important because the objective was to impact on the development of a common sense of nationhood which would play an important role in contributing to the development of the African Renaissance that was perceived to continue to be marginalised in higher education institutions. These include, in particular, fields of study such as African languages and culture, African literature (and not only in its English form) indigenous knowledge systems and more generally, the transformation of curricula to reflect the location of knowledge and curricula in the context of the African continent.⁵²

This objective of encouraging the development of programmes in marginalised fields of study, i.e. in African languages and the transformation of the curricula to reflect the African knowledge production in the context of the African continent was never realised because of lack of political will and commitment, on the one hand; and the result of the absence of genuine transformation in the academic institutions.⁵³

Minister of Education: Naledi Pandor

That is why when Naledi Pandor replaced Asmal as the Minister of Education in the second term (2004–2009) of President Mbeki; she instituted a commission to look into this obstruction to transformation in education. The consequence was the *Soudien Report on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions*.⁵⁴

The framework for *Language Policy for Higher Education 2002* takes into account the requirements of the constitution, the advice asked and received from the Council of Higher Education (CHE), as well as the objectives and goals of the National Plan for Higher Education (2001). In particular, it recognises the need to ensure equity of access and fair chances of success for all who seek to realise their potential through higher education. The framework also reflects the values and obligations of the Constitution, especially the need to promote multilingualism. For the first time, a genuine attempt will be made to ensure that all of our official languages are accorded parity of esteem.⁵⁵

Whilst the advice from the Council on Higher Education (CHE), *Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education (2001)*, communicated the development and promotion of the official African languages and Sign Language/s of South Africa, i.e., Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu, it communicated a great deal about ‘Multilingualism in a Democratic South Africa.’ For example, under this subtitle it asserted that ‘the South African Languages Draft Bill postulates, among others, the following objectives of a democratic language policy in a multilingual South Africa’; ‘to support economic development through the promotion of multilingualism’; ‘to provide for the learning of South African languages by all South African citizens in order to promote national unity and multiculturalism.’⁵⁶

Following on the *Language-in-Education Policy* (1997) of the Bhengu era, Asmal did not change anything about languages. Using different words he said the same things:

Learners should study by way of either their home language or English and their home language. In this way it should be possible for all learners to learn by way of their most familiar language. This is a right enjoyed in practice today by English and Afrikaans speakers alone. The implementation of this policy requires provincial-level action, to which end we would like to provide some guidelines.⁵⁷

The guidelines came in the form of two main values that the department wished to promote in the area of language:

Firstly, the importance of studying through the language one knows best, or as it is popularly referred to, mother tongue education; and secondly, the fostering of multilingualism. We do believe that an initial grounding in mother-tongue learning is a pedagogically sound approach to learning. We also believe that multi-cultural communication requires clear governmental support and direction.⁵⁸

Whilst the policy content is clear about the critical importance of the mother-tongue language in the education of the learner, again during the tenure of Asmal multilingualism and multiculturalism became more equal and important than the individual mother-tongue.

Speaking at a conference on Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 2006, Pandor said, regarding language in education, that the Department of Education had published a policy to give effect to the provisions of the Constitution, Section 29(2). The *Language in Education Policy* (1997) and the *Language Policy for Higher Education* (2002), noting that the provisions were designed to promote multilingualism in the education sector. Their aim is to ensure that all South African languages are 'developed to their full capacity while at the same time ensuring that the existing languages of instruction (English and Afrikaans) do not serve as a barrier to access and success.'⁵⁹

In this review, I have tried to show by policy statements of the various three ministers of education (Bhengu, Asmal and Pandor) of the post-apartheid governments that multilingualism and multiculturalism have taken an elevated priority over Section 29 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that says: 'everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice...' Those who continue to receive education in their official languages are not the African people who are the majority because in practice it is not their African languages that are 'the official languages' that communicate their education.

Minister of Basic Education & Minister of Higher Education and Training: Angie Motshekga and Blade Nzimande

In 2009 Jacob Zuma became the president of South Africa, and the Department of Education was divided into the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). At the beginning of 2014, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga said in a written reply to Parliament that her department was piloting the Incremental Introduction of African languages (IIAL) in schools all over the country. This is in line with *ANC 53rd National Conference Resolutions, Mangaung 16-20, 2012*, which states that ‘we should ensure the development and promotion of indigenous language, with a view to include (sic) the programme in the curriculum. And that an indigenous language policy which seeks to ensure that one African language should be compulsory in schools depending on the region should be developed in 2014.’⁶⁰ She said the purpose of the pilot is to identify challenges in the implementation of IIAL in order to inform full-scale implementation in 2015. The department said the pilot project was targeting the introduction of the previously marginalised African languages in schools where an African language was currently not on offer. Furthermore, the department said it was cognisant of the immensity of the challenge and said that was why it was not rushing the implementation. After 20 years, we still do not see the urgency to implement an African language policy in education. When a policy on English language and/or Afrikaans language was promulgated by the previous governments, education departments, institutions of higher education and schools automatically obeyed; they found means to execute that language policy and it became a legislated law of the country. Why should policy on African languages in education be different?

The *National Plan Commission Vision for 2030* (which is South Africa’s strategic national development framework and government policy for 2013-2030), speaking about ‘Improving Education, Training and Innovation’ emphasises the importance of African languages or mother tongue; and recognises them as an integral part to education, to science and technology, to development and that these languages must be preserved. Furthermore, it acknowledges that languages carry knowledge.⁶¹ What must be stressed here is that the knowledge that the language carries is that of its people, community and society; meaning that, the continuing absence of the African languages in our education and its curricula denies the African learner – white and black – his or her knowledge of self, family, community, society, country, region and the African continent.

Bantu Steve Biko further explains this in *I Write What I Like* (Chapter 15, ‘What is Black Consciousness’), how the absence of one’s language,

and not using your own African language can help in the development of an inferiority complex. The extract is from Biko's evidence in the SASO/BPC (South African Students' Organisation/Black People's Convention) Trial given in the first week of May 1976; and the exchange that follows is between Biko, the defence lawyer, Advocate David Soggot (assistant counsel for Defence) and the trial judge, Judge Boshoff:

Soggot: Is your concern not so much the restructure of the word 'black' in the world of linguistics so much as to alter the response of black people to their own blackness?

Biko: It is certainly directed at man, at the black man.

Soggot: And I think you were talking about your understanding of the black man's own sense of inferiority and self-hatred and all that?

Biko: Yes.

Soggot: In the world of language, how does the black man figure, how does he feel?

Biko: Yes I think this is another area where experiences of well, let me say difficulties that I have experienced. We have a society here in South Africa which recognises in the main two languages, English and Afrikaans as official languages. These are languages that you have to use at school, at university I mean, or in pursuit of any discipline when you are studying as a black man. Unfortunately the books you read are in English, English is a second language to you; you have probably been taught in a vernacular especially during these days of Bantu education up to Standard 6; you grapple with the language to JC [Junior Certificate] and matric [Grade 12], and before you conquer it you must apply it now to learn discipline at university. As a result you never quite catch everything that is in a book; you certainly understand the paragraph, (I mean I am talking about the average man now, I am not talking about exceptional cases) you understand the paragraph but you are not quite adept at reproducing an argument that was in a particular book, precisely because of your failure to understand certain words in the book. This makes you less articulate as a black man generally, and this makes you more inward-looking; you feel things rather than say them, and this applies to Afrikaans as well – much more to English than to Afrikaans; Afrikaans is essentially a language that has developed here, and I think in

many instances in its idiom, it relates much better to African languages; but English is completely foreign, and therefore people find it difficult to move beyond a certain point in their comprehension of the language.

Soggot: And how does this relate to the black man or in particular to the black students as inferiority?

Biko: An example of this for instance was again during the old days of NUSAS [National Union of South African Students] where students would be something that you as a black man have experienced in your day to day life, but your powers of articulation are not as good as theirs; also you have amongst the white students a number of students doing M.A., doing Honours, you know, in particular quarters, highly articulate, very intelligent. You may be intelligent but not as articulate, you are forced into a subservient role of having to say yes to what they are saying, talking about what you have experienced, which they have not experienced, because you cannot express it so well. This in a sense inculcates also in numerous students a sense of inadequacy. You tend to think that it is not just a matter of language, you tend to tie it up also with intelligence in a sense, you tend to feel that that guy is better equipped than you mentally.

Judge Boshoff: But why do you say that? Isn't English the official language of SASO?

Biko: Yes, it is.

Judge Boshoff: Well now, but your complaint is against the language but it is just the very language that you are using?

Biko: No, no, I am not complaining against the language, I am merely explaining how language can help in the development of an inferiority complex.⁶²

Pandor was the first post-1994 Minister of Education to *seriously* express concerns about the marginalisation of the African languages in our education. Being the first African woman Minister of Education, that anxiety is understandable because as a mother, she is the first teacher of her children, during pregnancy and from birth; she is the carrier of knowledge passed to children, and the home is the first school where she teaches and the first

language the child speaks is the language of the mother. Pandor's concerns resulted in the Soudien Report, named after the committee's chairperson, Professor Crain **Soudien**, that she had commissioned. The report made these important pronouncements under the subtitle of 'Language Transformation':

Language is the key to understanding oneself; it is the key to understanding others; and language mastery is the window to success in life – certainly in education. In essence, language affirms the individual; and it serves as a means of communication and, therefore, facilitates social cohesion. Its benefits are felt at both the individual and social level. Success in life and in education is organically related to language mastery. However, there is a prevailing tendency to be dismissive or sceptical of the seriousness of the language question.

The language issue is ... at the heart of the education crisis in our society. Language is the gateway to culture, knowledge, and people. The more languages one masters, the more one has access to other cultures, to more knowledge, and to more people... [It] must be stress[ed] that the mastery of [the] language in which the subject is taught is the prerequisite to the mastery of subject matter. To this extent, the Eurocentric character of our education, at the heart of which has been the use of European languages, has constituted a barrier to the successful education of the masses of African people. The African student has to make the acquaintance of the subject through a language [that is] not his or her mother-tongue. If the African student did not master the particular foreign language in childhood, alongside mother tongue, then the foreign language in which instruction proceeds becomes a tension-generating factor, for most students, which interferes with the mastery of the subject matter.

The role of language is therefore critical to higher education transformation, as it impacts on access and success, affirms diversity, while the right of a student to 'instruction in the language of his or her choice, where this is reasonably practicable', is afforded by the Constitution. It is no wonder then that language policy is the subject of contestation in higher education institutions. In this regard, all institutions are committed to multilingualism in one form or another, including the development of African languages as academic languages, and the introduction of African languages as languages of communication. However, more often than not, this commitment remains symbolic, for a range of factors.⁶³

Continuing Pandor's anxieties with the downgrading of African languages in education was Dr Blade Nzimande, the Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), who has probably made the greatest uproar and anger about the state and mis-placement of African languages in the curricula of our education. He expressed this in his mother-tongue, isiZulu when he said: '*Akukwazi ukuba yithi kuphela ekuthiwa sifunde isingisi nesibhunu bakwethu, kodwa ezethu iyilimi nabanye bangazifundi*' ('we cannot be expected to learn English and Afrikaans, yet they do not learn our languages'). He might as well have added, '*siphethe!*' ('Yet we are in power!')⁶⁴ The minister was speaking in Pretoria in 2011 at the launch of the Teacher Education and Development Plan for the next 15 years. It is worth noting that Nzimande is the first Minister of Education since 1994 who did not talk and prioritise multilingualism or multiculturalism. He is clear that what needs to happen is that students learn and study the African languages in higher education and that all university students pass one African language course as a requirement for graduation.

In his foreword to *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences, Final Report: 30 June 2011* Nzimande, referring to the legacy of apartheid education, said 'the fact that most children generally learn in a language that is not their home language – and is also the second or third language of their teachers – does not help either.'⁶⁵

This Charter noted that there is an urgent need to address the perceived crisis and the real imbalances in the tertiary education system vis-à-vis the fields of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), the report recommended that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) initiate a process to establish an Academy/Institute of Humanities and Sciences whose role will be amongst others, to create, in the first phase, five Virtual Schools that concentrate the scholarship of 150 PhD students in vital areas of HSS. 'The fifth Virtual School would focus on African Languages whose report on the Task Team for African Languages is still waiting.'⁶⁶

So far the one institution of higher learning that has taken the Minister serious about the inclusion of an African language in the curricula of the Higher Education is the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). In line with the University Language Policy and Plan and its Transformation Charter which seeks to develop African languages as academic languages, Renuka Vithal, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning and Chair of the UKZN Language Board made the following pronouncements:

- All new students registering for undergraduate degrees for the first time at UKZN from 2014 will – unless they get exemption – be required

to pass or obtain a credit for a prescribed isiZulu module before they can graduate.

- This rule, approved in principle by the University's Senate, gives tangible expression to UKZN's language policy and plan which is intended to promote and facilitate the use of isiZulu as a language of learning, communication, instruction and administration.
- It reflects UKZN's commitment to the development of isiZulu as an academic language alongside English which at this stage remains the main language of learning and instruction. That is, all degree programmes continue to be offered in the medium of English, while a selection of modules are being offered in isiZulu.
- During the first phase of the implementation (up until 2018), students and staff will develop communicative competence in isiZulu and English sufficient for academic interaction. Appropriate credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing language courses will be made available by the University during this time.
- Each degree programme will determine the appropriate level and type of proficiency. This is in line with the University Language Policy and Plan and our Transformation Charter which seeks to develop African languages as academic languages (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2014).⁶⁷

In its language policy, UKZN makes the argument that

At a University where more than 60 percent of students are isiZulu-speaking, the institution has an obligation to ensure linguistic choices result in effective learning solutions. Additionally, in a country that continues to be divided on the basis on linguistic identities, language should serve to bring diverse learning communities together and promote social cohesion. The belief that indigenous languages cannot be used for high level thinking and research is a myth.⁶⁸

In this sense, UKZN is the first South African university to make bilingualism a compulsory requirement in its curricula; and thus executing the mandate of the country's constitution in the specific areas of African languages. The non-isiZulu language speakers, by virtue of learning isiZulu language in the university curriculum, will learn the culture of amaZulu people as is the case when one studies English and Afrikaans.

Another university that comes close to UKZN in terms of language policy is Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape. The preamble of the Language Policy

of Rhodes University states ‘The policy is committed to the intellectualisation of African languages and creating the conditions for the use of particularly isiXhosa as a language of learning and eventually also teaching.’⁶⁹ I say close because not all first-year students at Rhodes University study isiXhosa language. According to Dr Sam Naidu of the English Department at Rhodes University, speaking at Rhodes University’s Multilingualism Colloquium in October 2014, the revised language policy affects each and every member of the Rhodes community:

Whether you are a research student wishing to write your thesis in a language other than English or whether you are a gardener or caterer wishing to conduct your job interview in a language other than English, provision is made for your language rights.

This growing awareness of and attention to the politics of language in higher education is a trend, which is firmly established at Rhodes. Whereas before the revision students could only learn isiXhosa as a second or additional language, today approximately 600 students are studying isiXhosa at both mother tongue and second language levels, including undergraduate, Honours, Masters and PhD levels as well as the vocation-specific courses including Journalism, Law, Education and Pharmacy.⁷⁰

Whilst the University is aware that much work remains to be done to achieve its pronounced African language policy, this is a significant milestone for UKZN and calls for other institutions to follow nationally. Part of the work that remains to be done includes having name tags of the different faculties and buildings on campus in isiZulu. In my research in the education and curricula of Tanzania, I was impressed to notice that faculties of various schools, departments, offices of deans and Vice-Chancellors had signs in Kiswahili only and not in English or in both Kiswahili and English.

I argue that it is precisely because since 1994 the constitutional mandate that speaks to the African languages was not implemented in our national education system is the reason behind President Jacob Zuma’s approval of the *Use of Official Languages Act No. 12 of 2012*; that came into effect on 2 May 2013. In a sense, the Act seeks to enforce specifically that which in the constitution addresses the official African languages. The South African Parliament promulgated this legislation to regulate the use of official languages in government. What this Act implies is that for South Africa to have a tangible language transformation, the national departments, national public entities, and national public enterprises

should adopt a language policy and establish their national language units within the 18 months of the commencement of the Act, i.e. between May 2013 and November 2014.⁷¹ At end of October 2014, the Minister of Arts & Culture, Mr Nathi Mthethwa, extended the deadline for all national departments, public entities and enterprises to establish language units that formulate language policies to enable the public to obtain information in the languages of their choice. The new deadline is 2 May 2015. The Minister said he was deeply concerned about the slow implementation of this law. He warned that this will be seen as government failing to implement its own regulations:

It is with grave concern that I note the slow progress with regard to the implementation of the Use of Official Languages Act (No 12 of 2012) that stipulated that all national government departments, public entities and public enterprises must have language policies in place by 2 November 2014.

Lack of adherence to the Act will result in audit queries as it will be regarded by the Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA) as non-compliance to government legislation and regulations.⁷²

The Minister has granted the extension under the following conditions:

- A status report on progress with regard to the implementation of the Act is received by 30 January 2015.
- All language policies, drafted in such a way that they are appropriate to the context and operations of national departments, public enterprises and public entities are gazetted for public comment by 31 March 2015.
- All language policies are adopted by 2 May 2015.
- The language units staffed by language professionals and other practitioners responsible for translation across all languages should be in operation by 2 May 2015.⁷³

These justified complaints of ‘the slow progress with regard to the implementation’ and ‘lack of adherence to the Act’ by the Minister at the end of the historic year, 2014, that marks the twentieth year of South Africa’s liberation from apartheid rule, bring us to the present-day state of affairs of the language policy.

What the legislation of this Act points to is the fact that whilst the democratic constitution of South Africa had enacted in 1996 that ‘the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use

of these languages',⁷⁴ it has taken almost 20 years for the government to pass an Act that seeks practically and legally to *enforce* the use of all the official languages of the country – who are mainly African languages, including a sign language. Yet, we know with hindsight of the past two decades of our freedom that the passing of an Act does not necessarily mean its implementation.

Conclusion: Language Policy Recommendations and Strategies

Before I provide recommendations and policy strategies as a way-forward beyond the twenty-year anniversary of our liberation, I want to reiterate few upsetting concerns that are at the heart of writing this language in education policy review article.

One, we know that the implementation of what the Constitution pronounces about the official African languages in the education and curricula of South Africa and the implementation of the Use of Official Languages Act No. 12 of 2012 would be a costly exercise; just as it was expensive for the implementation of English and Dutch – and later Afrikaans – as the official languages in the South African education and curricula of the past and of its continuing present. This was (is) subjugation of the African languages. But what will be even more costly enterprise is if South Africa's education, both at basic education, higher education and training, continues to deny its majority citizens the languages that carry knowledge about themselves, their cultures and heritage.

Since 1994 we have had four African presidents in Mandela, Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe and Zuma; but during that twenty-year period none of 'My Black President', to quote Brenda Fassie's famous song, gave a State of the Nation Address in parliament in any of the official African languages. To stress this point further, Zuma is the most traditionalist African president in terms of openly identifying himself, from the outset of his presidency, with the amaZulu traditions of his ancestry, for example, his polygamous practices. Regardless his lack of a formal education, Zuma's greatest resource is his articulation of his mother-tongue, isiZulu. So it is a failure of serious consideration that in his first five-year term he never gave an address in parliament in this rich resource of his mother-tongue of which he has such a forceful and calming command. According to the *Census 2011* results, more than a fifth of the population speak isiZulu at home, and just more than 11.5 million people use isiZulu as their first language. By choosing to address the nation in English, a language that he does not command very well, President Zuma – and by extension, Presidents Mandela, Mbeki and Motlanthe – have excluded the majority of the citizens from accessing their speeches.

This is one challenge that, as we proudly celebrate 20 years of our liberation, we must confront head-on because how can we be free when we don't

write, speak and learn in our African languages? The education of a people or nation is useless if it teaches them nothing about themselves.

Having said all that, I would like to propose that, after twenty years (1994-2014), a direct confrontation is necessary to effect these policy recommendations and strategies that this language in education policy appraisal presents as a way forward.

Firstly, the post-apartheid government of the ANC should learn a lesson from the apartheid government and from its *Bantu Education* policy. Apartheid as a government policy succeeded because just as *Bantu Education* was an integral part of apartheid, so was the language in education policy was integral to both *Bantu Education* and apartheid. The entire plan worked perfectly, because all the component parts were in logical symmetry. It was no accident that the administration of apartheid language policy, the State Language Service (SLS) was located within the central Department of Education during the National Party rule.⁷⁵ The properly run machinery of the SLS has made the effects of this policy to be such that Bantu Education has developed a lifespan of its own – one which continues to outlive its parent, *Grand Apartheid*. The point being made here is that we have to be frank; there were never going to be any quick solutions to reverse or transform the process.

Secondly, the success of Kiswahili language as the language of communication in Tanzania throughout the Nyerere rule was because curriculum development and language policy developments through the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) were not kept separate from each other. This is a continuing South African problem: ‘separate development’! We need integration of curriculum review policy and language review policy in both Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training.

Thirdly, we must implement what is inscribed in our Constitution pertaining to African languages and education, which UNESCO supports:

Opt for valuing and developing African languages as the most vibrant means of communication and source of identity of the majority of the African people, and construct all language policies accordingly (e.g. accept African languages as official languages and as languages for exams).⁷⁶

Fourthly, to move in the direction of executing this third point, we must delete in our minds the myth that there is no or not enough indigenous South African research undertaken in our country in the subject of languages in education. Volume of research is in abundance that points conclusively to the disastrous effects of attempting to teach mainly through English when conditions do not and cannot make this possible.

Fifthly, when the majority of the South African population speak African languages, it makes no sense to say that there are no 'qualified' people or teachers available to teach African languages. Right, there are no adequate personnel 'certified' or 'qualified' – as in certification and qualification – to teach these indigenous languages. The 'State Language Service (SLS)' of the current government (Pan South African Language Board – PSALB) should provide the mechanisms to select the young and the elderly speakers of African languages across the country – in rural and urban areas – for in-service-training to certify and qualify them to be proficient teachers of South Africa's indigenous languages in the school and higher education system.

Lastly, the slow progress on the implementation of national policies, such as this language in education policy that is meant to bring socio-cultural transformation to the entire education system, is hampered by the employment of unqualified personnel in key strategic positions in government. Reacting to this real threat, the Public Service Commission (PSC) of South Africa has compiled a damning discussion document that was tabled at its three-day high-level conference on Developmental State with the theme of 'Building a Public Service to Underpin a Developmental State in South Africa', on 11-13 November 2014 in Pretoria. The document says 'cadre deployment' is mis-used to reward undeserving, inexperienced and unqualified political party officials. The commission researched countries like China and Singapore, where cadre deployment is the norm and governing party members hold nearly 80 per cent of posts in the civil service. The document says in these countries, 'the ruling political parties have ensured that those deployed are qualified and the deployment of cadres has not undermined the meritocratic nature of the public service. But here at home, the civil service must appoint suitably qualified people based on experience – not just political considerations.'⁷⁷ In June 2014, there were ten vacant positions of Directors-General (DGs) that affect the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP). The PSC chairperson, Mr. Ben Mthembu, has warned that the state's inability to act decisively in the filling of senior positions in various national departments would impact on the implementation of the NDP. Amongst the problems he lists that exacerbates this situation are cadre deployment and policy uncertainty.⁷⁸

The ANC Secretary-General, Gwede Mantashe, has defended the cadre deployment: 'You cannot expect the ANC to depend on people who are hostile to the position of the ANC. It will not work and the ANC will run into disarray because you will have graduates and businessmen and women who are competent, but who are hostile to the programme of the ANC. You can't expect that to work.'⁷⁹ In particular there is flight of black middle class and young people, the 'graduates' that Mantashe mentions, to the opposition is a

threat to the ANC's power at the polls. In the national elections in May 2014, the ANC scored a reduced majority of 62.15 per cent, the lowest level since it began leading South Africa's democratic government in 1994. The ANC's seats in the National Assembly went down to 249 from 264 in 2009 and 279 in 2004.⁸⁰ The African and black professionals who have continued to vote the ANC since 1994 feel marginalised by the cadre deployment policy of the ruling party when it comes to employment in the government where they are mostly needed to effect and implement the policies, i.e. language in education policy, for national transformation.⁸¹

It is about time – in fact overdue – to return to valuing and appreciating the professionals who have the practical working expertise, experiences, skills, capacity and training in the fields that the South African Government and its Public Service – across the national, provincial and local government departments – want to see transformed. Probably this is the most important policy recommendation and policy strategy that Government must prioritise. The implementation of all these five-fold policy recommendations, rest on the employment of these human resources, readily available, but currently experiencing marginalisation.

Dedication

Our mother, Mmaramoupi Nkomeng Toto, who turns 84 years on 22 February 2016.
Re A Leboga Mme (thank you mother).

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